

TKD Thesis

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***Mosgiel Taekwon-Do***

**Taekwon-Do: Way of life**

## **Introduction**

My essay is about how Taekwon-Do helped me with my work life balance and the mental health issues that happened when my work had consumed me. Much of my adult life had been focused towards the pressure associated with growing and managing a business and my family slowly seemed to slip out of the picture, this also had a detrimental effect on my mental health.

Then I found Taekwon-Do and began to shift back to making more time for activities outside of work. In this journey I found that not only was I getting fitter, my mental health improved vastly and I was able to start enjoying my family more. I was learning new skills and beginning to understand the importance of a better balance in my life. This essay is about how Taekwon-Do changed my life for the better. This is my personal journey.

## **Mental Health and Well Being My Story.**

I have experienced firsthand the benefits this Martial Art has in playing an important part in my physical and mental health. I am of the belief that, had I not started this journey, I could be a vastly different man today than the one I have now become. My Taekwon-Do journey and the changes in me as a person began in the year 2005. I had been working in excess of 100 hours per week for almost 10 years, consisting of hard physical labour, as well office type work. Due to being self-employed with a reasonably young business, I was responsible for not only myself and my family, I also had a responsibility for the staff I employed. The buck stopped with me and if the business was to be successful it meant long hard hours. With a substantial amount of my time going into the business, this meant I spent less time with my family and not getting near enough sleep. In the hours I wasn't working I was tired and I struggled to keep work out of my mind while at home. I was not giving my family the quality time they should have been getting from me when I walked in the door. What my family and I scarified to successfully build the business in order to benefit and secure our future, only added another layer of stress to an already overloaded, maxed out and fatigued body. This in turn had a negative flow on effect to my family life as well as friendships. Regardless of my goal to work hard, striving to succeed and providing financial stability and security for my family, it was natural for me to then carry some guilt for what I was not giving them in the here and now. The cost was the obvious lack of quality time with my family when the quantity was so limited.

Over time I became a very anxious, fatigued, consistently stressed out, and quick to anger person. As a Husband, Father, Employer I was pushing myself physically and mentally to the very limits, and there were certainly times I would push myself too far. Over the five years prior to 2005 I began to experience panic attacks because I was so mentally and physically taxed, and had an overall feeling of unwellness within myself. Obviously not wanting to be experiencing neither, I made an appointment to see my GP where I was given medical intervention to help. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case and the medication was no help at all. Another appointment was made where I was advised to try exercise, but my lifestyle and obligations with work and my family left me without the time or energy to do so. I did however take the advice given by the Doctor onboard and joined a gym around 2002. This started off ok at first, but with no personal trainer or planned workout routine it meant I could pick and choose what I wanted and didn't want to do. So, with good intentions but a lack of energy, it was easy to avoid the harder option and more often than not choose the easy road. The gym membership and halfhearted exercise regime continued for a whole 2 months, before days were missed and it eventually dwindled until I gave up the gym completely. I continued the cycle of feeling unwell and the panic attacks starting to become far more severe. At times they would cause me to pass out, which was not only less than ideal, they were also now becoming potentially dangerous. I continued to live with this feeling of unwellness, anxiety and panic attacks for approximately 5 years, although I did cut my hours back to 80-90 hour per week so I could at least spend some time with my family.

### **The Turning Point.**

As a child I had spent some time doing the martial arts Karate and Judo, achieving yellow belts in both. This led to a decision in 2005 to try a martial art in order to spend more quality time with my children which was severely lacking. I felt as if I was missing their childhoods which upset me greatly. The idea I had took some time to convince my wife that it was in fact a great idea. It wasn't an easy achievement to sway my wife, but after mutually agreeing I was given the "Yes", it was decided that I would enrol our children to learn a Martial Art. The Yes was no easy feat as my wife was at first dead against the idea, believing it was all about fighting. After I had sat and presented the idea, I told her of my own memories and experiences as a child when I had taken classes, and a martial art was not at all about fighting as many perceive it to be, but it was more about learning not to, and having the ability to protect yourself if needed. Upon achieving the "Green Light" from my wife, I found a TKD club in Mosgiel in 2005, this is where I decided to enrol our children. I sat to the side for some weeks watching, after approximately 6 weeks of attending each session I was forced into forming up. The instructor Mrs. Allen had asked me on several occasions to join in, I think she got sick of the parent at the side line trying to tell the children they were doing it wrong, I think she practically dragged me up to shut me up. This is when I found out it was harder than it looked, and if I was to sit and critique my children I really should be able to "walk the walk" not just sit and "talk the talk". I continued to attend training for approximately 2 months when it occurred to me that my panic attacks had become less frequent and that I was also feeling better within myself. What fascinated me was the learning and technical side. I found when I got to training my brain was able to shut everything else out and focused on what I was being told. I wasn't in charge like I had to

be in my work place, I was the one being given instructions instead. After around 6 months I had “The Bug” and that for the first time in 5 or so years my panic attacks had actually stopped completely, also my anxiety was under control, and my stress levels had lowered substantially. I found myself performing better at work, my relationships with my wife and children was the best it had ever been. It got to the point that I was worried if I was unable to attend training. I felt I needed it more than it needed me and had become a positive, vital and consistent tool in my life.

Taekwon-Do has helped me in so many aspects of my life, because of the exercise, the mindset and control required and the continuous learning. It was I believe, my saviour. Discovering an interest that was able to change, or in most cases stop my negative thought processes helped me in becoming a more patient and calmer person. Events in my day to day life that in the past may have triggered anger and annoyance had dramatically declined and almost became nonexistent, both at work and at home. Since starting Taekwon-Do I have had far more control and am able to process calmly and rationally everyday challenges, focusing on getting the desired end result and with resilience knowing that I may get knocked down but I will continue to forge ahead. The person I am now is almost a stranger to the person I once was. There have been dramatic positive changes within myself, I now have the ability to react calmly and rationally when dealing with situations. I was able to perform better at work and started to really enjoy life. I believed in the tenets of Taekwon-Do and to this day live by them. Once at training the hassle and bustle of a busy day at work disappears and my focus changes. I always feel better after training and this has to be good. It's almost like there is a one way door once I walk into the dojang because nothing else exists for time being. The focus changes and so do all other priorities at this point, it is “a break in the traffic” and “just what the doctor ordered “so many years before”. I view these training sessions as a reset for my mind. I don't believe I'm the only one that has this experience, and training has definitely become a vital life line for myself as a person. To have found such a positive and structured outlet, with the bonus factor of enjoyment in what I am doing, as I push myself mentally and physically has giving me the ability to shut out the world even just for a short time while I catch my breath. This has been undoubtably and undeniably a game changer for me.

### **My Next Challenge.**

It took me 7 years to Dan grade and this was a massive feat for me. Earning my black belt was an achievement that I could have never imagined accomplishing all those years earlier. I had never achieved anything like this in my life before that was just for myself, and I was overwhelmed with what I had been able to achieve. I had never been athletic and was a student who was not gifted as many younger students were with the natural ability to perform. My motor skills, balance and flexibility were at the bottom of the bucket, but with determination and hard work I was able to at least see improvements. I was the fittest I had ever been in my life, but also had gained and learned so much within myself on this journey.

This is when the next door of my challenge was opened. At my oral interview I didn't really know what to expect, but boy was I in for a surprise. (GM) Master McPhail congratulated me on my performance

thus far being halfway through the grading, and also thanked me in a roundabout way for taking over the Mosgiel Club as the new head instructor ( if I was successful at the grading - no pressure). We were currently without an instructor as our previous one had unexpectedly left on short notice. I was left momentarily speechless, and brief as it was I could only hope I had managed to keep my composure and my expression unchanged, when inwardly I was anything but. Nothing like being put on the spot and an answer being required of me under pressure. So believing that there was only one correct answer ( I was grading after all), every correct answer was one closer to a Pass. I got it together enough to graciously, although still slightly perplexed as to what was going on, agree to take on this role the only hurdle being the second half of my grading and a pass on completion. I had unwittingly just now, mid grading, agreed to become the new instructor of our club. Upon completion of the grading and a nerve wracking few days waiting for results, I achieved the desired pass and took on the responsibility as the new instructor at the Mosgiel TKD club.

### **Progression.**

Being an instructor albeit a very green one, was challenging but also extremely rewarding. There were definitely times at the beginning of the role which left me feeling completely out of my depth, and had me questioning if I was the right person for the role. But over time my confidence grew, and I felt as though I was growing into the role. Without question the most rewarding aspect of my role would have to be working with students who like myself aren't gifted with natural ability. However the most rewarding for me is working with students of all ages and helping them face their demons, whether they be students battling with anxiety, panic attacks, depression, anger, self-esteem, and self-harm. In some cases I have helped students who have had, or have been subject to abuse and unfortunately there are many forms of this. Being an instructor I now know is far more than just training, it involves working and gaining trust, loyalty, understanding, friendships etc, and mutual respect. This can require different instructing methods for each individual student depending on their ability and how they process the information given. This has without a doubt helped in my own personal growth, progression and improved my mental health. I have learnt that one shoe doesn't fit all, and sometimes you have to try many different methods to accommodate each student, as everyone differs in levels and learning styles. The students with natural ability strive and are quite easy to teach, although you have to consistently keep them engaged so they don't become bored. There are students who like myself, that struggle and find things more challenging which mean they are having to try far harder to reach and achieve the required results. In either case we have to at times change our approach, and this can be quite a challenge. I try to customise the best method of learning for each student, how they learn, and how to positively encourage and engage them because I want them to continue learning to improve themselves. Once I figured this out I can go about getting the best results for them.

### **Dealing with Health issues**

In 2019 I began to suffer headaches, dizziness and sometimes a loss of balance. After several doctors visits and hospital appointments, I was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Undoubtedly this was an extremely stressful time for both me and my family. A short time after my diagnosis I underwent surgery. Prior to going into surgery the surgeon explained the procedure and advised after the operation I would lose the hearing in my left ear and also the balance nerves on my left side. After being told this a huge concern for me was my Taekwon-Do. What will happen to my training? Would I still be able to train? How and in what way will this affect me?

My operation took 6.5 hours. I was moved from theatre to the recovery ward at 7.30pm, and had round the clock care continuously for 48 hours. A nurse would sit next to my bed to monitor my vitals, and was woken every 15 minutes with tests carried out to check my eyes, the strength in my legs arms and hands, my blood pressure, and heart rate etc. At 7am the next morning I asked to get up and have a shower and I was told I had to “walk before I could run”. Upon hearing this answer I informed the nurse that I had changed my goal and then I asked to go for a walk. This is how I discovered that its rather handy to have an operational balance nerve in both sides of your head. I found this day in particular quite challenging in regards to my balance and a dizzy sensations In my head, which I still have to this day. Even a few short walks around the room I found exhausting. I then asked again for my shower, which this time it was begrudgingly granted with a lot of hesitation. After a 5-minute shower that was me done for the day, absolutely worn out, but showered. I had achieved my goal for that day. The following day I was allowed to walk, or shall I say learn to walk again, with my newly acquired drunken style walk. Everything around me was spinning, everything was moving which made this very challenging, however by the end of the day I was allowed to attack the corridors on my own, although I wasn't allowed to leave the ward. These accomplishments I had achieved within 48 hours of my operation. I had walked past the elevator several times and I couldn't help myself I had to go exploring. I got into the elevator and went up and down, and practiced a bending ready stance (True Story ). This was a really challenging but made me feel good especially when I could feel my balance slowly improving. I did this many times and kept practicing in my room as well as the elevator and before you ask, NO! I did not do this in front of anyone else getting on and off the elevator. On day three I was granted permission to head down to the ground floor, as far as the café which was just outside the elevator doors, and once again (not) doing what I was told I ended up venturing outside the hospital grounds. I would take myself walk about and go exploring. All this bad behaviour did end up being beneficial, assisting with an early discharge from hospital as the doctors were extremely happy with my improvement so far. I was now free to go home.

My rehabilitation continued for the next year and a half, which included almost a year off work. I was back to training within 8 weeks of my operation and although my balance still gave me a lot of grief, I kept at it. I had my vestibular therapist amazed at my progress because some of the exercises she had given me, I had replaced with TKD techniques and as I realised I was achieving better results especially with patterns that involved turning bending and kicks. I admit they certainly may not have been pretty but they were consistently helping me get better throughout my rehabilitation process. I have learnt that General Choi had quite an understanding when it comes to balance, body movement and positioning of the hand and arms especially when kicking. This has been a massive help in my

rehabilitation. Once again Taekwon-Do has helped me through an extremely tough time in my life and I am still recovering and improving each day. I will never regain the balance I once had prior to my surgery but will be the best I can be. My second Dan patterns have been extremely challenging especially Eui-Am and Juche, but have helped me no end, and I still enjoy them and give many thanks for their part in my recovery.

### **Summary.**

To summarise; it's clear that Tae-Kwon-Do has had a huge impact on my life and has helped me become a more resilient stronger person, assisting me through tough mental and physically challenging times. I have also gained great satisfaction by helping others achieve their goals. I am now far calmer and understanding. It has benefited me when I see good morals and resilience in my students. I have formed several great lifelong friendships as well. Taekwon-Do has been such a rewarding journey that has helped me improve my life throughout and will continue to do so. All the many attributes I have gained, as well as learning how to protect oneself and family had helped us all so much, This Martial Arts has so much to offer. Many thanks to you General Choi for your wonderful gift to us all.

### General Quotes

Choi Hong Hi: "Lao Tzu" Translation "The term Stronger, is the person who wins over one's self rather than someone else"

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